

Fires have taken toll in C-W area

Two huge forest blazes within seven years of each other, two large fires in Camas and a recent one in Washougal, are Camas-Washougal's claim to fame on destruction of property by fire.

Forest fires of 1895

The eastern part of Clark County was widely ravaged by forest fires on May 22, 1895.

The fire started somewhere in the vicinity of the Little Washougal River or between the two forks of the Washougal River, between six and eight miles north of the town itself.

According to the Vancouver Independent of May 22, "the fire, driven by strong east winds, swept through the canyons and over the hills of the eastern part of the county, destroying timber and property on every hand."

The fire raged for two days, damaging property from the Little Washougal to Lackamas Lake. Few farmers in the area lost everything, but many lost a barn, a house, some timberland or crops.

Damage was estimated by the Independent as "in the many thousands of dollars."

Yacolt Burn of 1902

Property loss alone reached over \$1 million in the legendary Yacolt Burn, until the '20s, the greatest fire in U.S. history. Sixteen lost their lives in the blaze, which destroyed what the Sept. 25, 1902, *Columbian* called "the verdant valley of the North Fork of the Lewis River."

What made the Burn so devastating was that it was a series of intense fires which started almost simultan-

eously. Sparks from these fires landed on the many brush piles around this newly-logged area, starting "a hurricane of flame, thanks to the strong wind," the *Columbian* said.

Between the towns of Ariel, 18 miles east of Kalama, and Yale, nine miles southeast of the former, the blaze reached its most fierce proportions. Sixteen were caught in the fanned flames near Yale, accounting for all the reported deaths due to the burn. The north side of the Lewis River was where the greatest destruction occurred.

Even though damage was widespread, few of the farmers in the area left after the burn. The ground was far more productive than before the fire, and farming in the area blossomed thereafter.

The *Columbian* estimated \$1 million in losses in timber alone and \$30,000 in losses to farm structures and crops. Thirty families were left homeless.

Great Camas fire of 1923

The fire of Nov. 11, 1923, threatened the business district of Camas with complete destruction, wiping out the Keister Variety Store, Camas

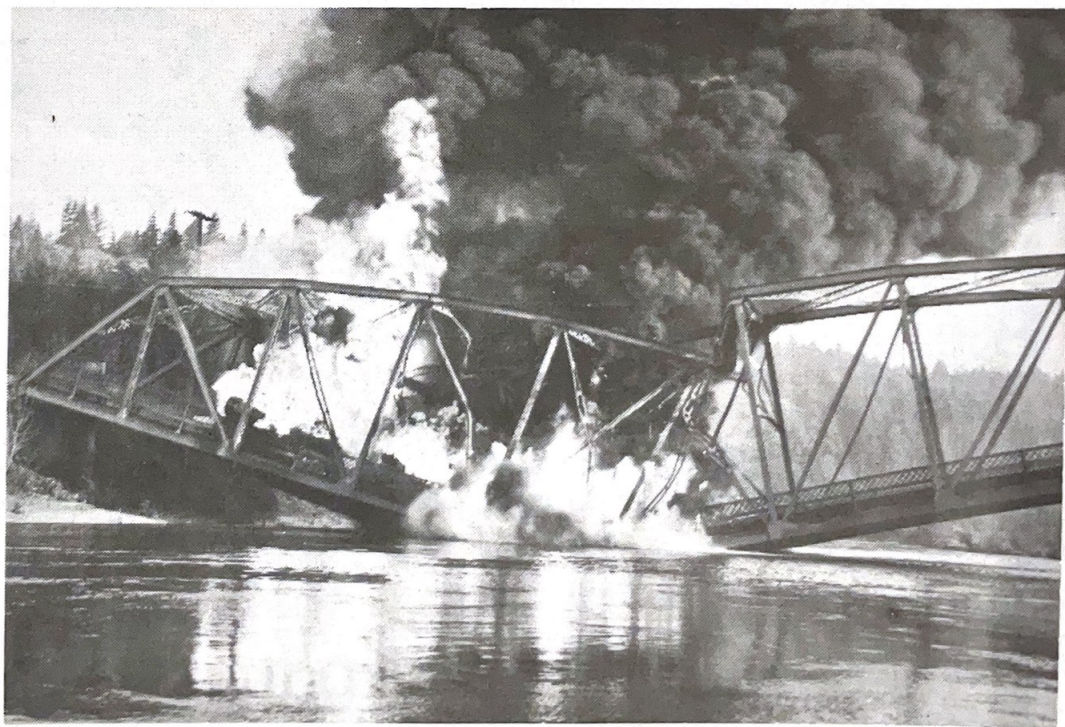
Mercantile Co., Highway Pharmacy, and The Community Market.

An alarm was turned in at about 10 p.m. The streets immediately filled with town residents, who began to help the firemen. The mill fire crew also reported to the blaze.

The variety store's losses were estimated at \$7,000. Camas Mercantile absorbed the greatest loss, losing \$35,000 in property to the fire.

All the buildings were — in a fit of hindsight — rebuilt of brick so as not to burn so easily.

Cont. on page 81



HOW COULD A STEEL BRIDGE BURN? It didn't seem possible, but that's what happened in February 1947, when two oil trucks collided on a bridge crossing the Washougal River between Camas and Washougal. The heat was so intense that the steel beams melted and buckled. Amazingly, no one was seriously injured. The bridge was valued at \$42,000. Of photos appearing in several Northwest newspapers and *Life* magazine, this is the only one of the bridge making contact with the river. It was taken by Les Goff on Feb. 6, 1947.